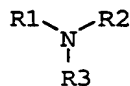


We claim:

1. A process for extracting 2-keto-L-gulonic acid (KGA) from a polar solvent, which process comprises the following step:
- 5 (a) extraction of the 2-keto-L-gulonic acid from the polar, preferably aqueous, solvent with an extractant 1 comprising a tertiary amine of the formula



- 10 where R1, R2 and/or R3 is in each case a saturated unbranched or branched alkyl radical having, independently of one another or simultaneously, 6 to 14 carbon atoms;
- and a polar organic diluent;
- and where the extractant 1 has a miscibility gap with the solvent.

- 15 2. A process as claimed in claim 1, where the solvent comprises ascorbic acid and 2-keto-L-gulonic acid.
3. A process as claimed in claim 1 or 2, where the alkyl radical R1, R2 and/or R3
- 20 comprises in each case 8 to 12 carbon atoms.
4. A process as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3, where the tertiary amine is tri-n-octylamine and/or tri-n-decylamine.
- 25 5. A process as claimed in any of claims 1 to 4, where the diluent is a saturated branched or unbranched alkyl alcohol having 4 to 14 carbon atoms or an amide or an aromatic compound.
6. A process as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5, where the diluent is i- or n-dodecanol.
- 30 7. A process as claimed in any of claims 1 to 6, where the ratio of tertiary amine of the formula I to the diluent is from 20:80 to 80:20, preferably 40:60.
8. A process as claimed in any of claims 1 to 7, comprising the following further step:
- 35 (b) back-extraction of the KGA from the loaded extractant 1 with a polar extractant 2, resulting in a KGA-loaded extractant 2.

9. A process as claimed in claim 8, where extractant 2 and the solvent consist essentially of the same solvent components.
10. A process as claimed in claim 9, where the extraction temperature T_1 is from 5°C to 100°C lower than the back-extraction temperature T_2 .
11. A process as claimed in any of claims 8 to 10, comprising the following further step:
(c) recycling of extractant 1 from which the KGA was back-extracted in step (b) into the extraction of step (a).
12. A process as claimed in any of claims 8 to 11, comprising the following further step:
(d) recycling of the KGA-loaded extractant 2 from the back-extraction in step (b) into a process for preparing ascorbic acid from KGA.
13. A process as claimed in claim 12, comprising the following further steps:
(e) concentration of the KGA-loaded extractant 2 before the recycling in step (d);
and
(f) optionally, recycling of the vapors from the evaporation in (e) as extractant 2 in step (b).
14. A process as claimed in claim 13, comprising at least one of the following further steps:
(g) washing of the KGA-loaded extractant 1 with the solvent or with the mother liquor from the crystallization of ascorbic acid from the solvent and combining of the ascorbic acid-containing wash solution with the ascorbic acid-loaded solvent in step (a);
(h) concentration of the ascorbic acid-loaded solvent 1; and
(i) recycling of the solvent discharge from step (h) into the back-extraction in step (b) as extractant 2.
15. The process as claimed in claim 14, comprising the following further steps:
(j) isolation of the ascorbic acid from the ascorbic acid-loaded solvent, with a mother liquor remaining behind; and
(k) optionally, recycling of the mother liquor from step (j) into the concentration in step (h).
16. A process for preparing ascorbic acid, which comprises the following steps:
i. lactonization of 2-keto-L-gulonic acid;

19

- ii. extraction of the KGA from the ascorbic acid/KGA mixture as set forth in any of claims 2 to 12; and
- iii. isolation of the ascorbic acid from the ascorbic acid-loaded solvent.

5 17. A process as claimed in claim 16, where partial lactonization is carried out.